

Briefing Statement

Topic: **Leasing of the David Walker Farmstead**

Date: **February 3, 2010**

Dangerously derelict historic buildings have been rehabilitated through a multi-million dollar investment of private funds, and now have a vital new use as a pre-school. This investment serves the park's dual mission of preservation and education, and serves the community by providing a home for a long-time community institution.

The National Park Service signed a 40-year lease with the Montessori Children's House of Valley Forge, a not-for-profit 501(C)3 organization for the David Walker Farmstead, a 3.7-acre site located on the southern boundary of the park. The park's purpose for the lease is to preserve and restore historic buildings through the use of non-federal funds.

Following a complete rehabilitation of the property, MCHVF opened a pre-school there on February 1, 2010.

Leasing authority

36 CFR Part 18 gives the National Park Service authority to lease buildings, provided certain criteria are met. (These criteria are noted at the end of this paper.) The law recognizes that national parks are responsible for maintaining a large portfolio of historic and modern buildings, and that some of these buildings are not necessary or suitable for visitor services or for park operations. Exercise of the authority enables a park to work with partners to rehabilitate and keep these buildings in good condition.

Project

Valley Forge NHP leased the park's David Walker Farmstead and Evans property to the MCHVF, an established community-based pre-school. At its own expense, MCHVF invested \$3.8 million in rehabilitation of the structures and property. New construction was outweighed by demolition of non-historic structures, resulting in a net decrease in overall square footage.

The MCHVF project provides the following advantages to the park:

- Historic structures on the site were brought into good condition using non-federal funds.
- The structures were removed from the park's backlog list of deferred maintenance, since the school now is responsible for maintenance following rehabilitation. Maintenance will be performed in accordance with a maintenance and preservation plan approved by the National Park Service.
- A partnership with the school provides opportunities to develop educational programs the park can use for all young children.

The project provides the following advantages to the community:

- A highly visible and dilapidated eyesore for which there is no likelihood of federal funding was rehabilitated and brought into good condition.

- A pre-school which was part of the neighborhood for four decades was returned to serve families in the community.

The David Walker Farmstead

- The 3.7-acre site is located on the southern boundary of the park.
- The site is bounded by a residential neighborhood (Glen Hardie) on the east, the Pennsylvania Turnpike on the south, and by park meadows on the west and north sides. (Please see attached map.)
- The David Walker Farmstead comprises a National Register-significant main house and root cellar, and a non-contributing barn, tenant house, and several small outbuildings. None of the buildings was present during the 1777-78 encampment and the property does not relate to the central theme of the park.
- The property was acquired by the federal government in 1978 but remained in a use-and-occupancy permit until 2003. The tenant did not maintain the property during the use and occupancy period, and fell into poor condition.
- The buildings were vacant for five years and were increasingly a target for illegal activities.
- During the park's recently completed General Management Plan process, it was determined that there is no necessary or feasible visitor services or park operations use for the property, and that adaptive use is appropriate.
- The adjacent Evans property comprised a 1958 concrete-block house and garage, which was demolished as part of this plan

The Montessori Children's House of Valley Forge

- The Montessori Children's House of Valley Forge Inc. was established as a not-for-profit, parent-owned corporation in 1964.
- The school is affiliated with the American Montessori Society. The Board of Directors comprises parents elected from the parent membership. The school serves pre-school through kindergarten, and enrolls 76 children, with plans to grow to 135 children.
- The school has served the Valley Forge community for 40 years. It previously occupied space in St. Matthew's United Methodist Church, located about 3500' from the David Walker Farmstead. From 2006 to 2010 the school occupied space in a church located several miles from the park.

Other Alternatives Considered

- During the planning process for the lease, some community members asked whether other potential uses for the buildings were considered. During the park's recent five-year long General Management Plan public process, a key inquiry was which of the park's almost 200 buildings are necessary and suitable for visitor use or services. It was determined that there is no feasible visitor use or internal use for the David Walker and Evans buildings, and that adaptive re-use would be considered. This topic was included in the public meetings held during that planning process, and only positive comments were received regarding the potential of leasing as a means for preservation.
- The park considered the potential for lease of the buildings to an individual for residential use, or to a for-profit entity for office or commercial use. The requirement

for such a tenant to invest several million dollars in stabilization and restoration, to bear the extra cost to rehabilitate the buildings according to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Historic Preservation*, to be able to amortize the costs over a long period, and to enter into and successfully sustain a forty-year lease with the federal government was considered to preclude a successful outcome.

Status

- The David Walker main house was restored and is being used for school meeting space and a residence for one teacher and family.
- The three-story portion of the barn was rehabilitated. An addition to the barn in the space currently occupied by the single-story portion now holds classrooms.
- The 1958 concrete-block Evans house and garage was demolished. The demolition area now is the location of a parking lot, which will be screened from view from the neighborhood and the park.
- Storm water management facilities were constructed underground.
- The playground will be constructed in spring 2010, and will not be visible from the street.
- Site lighting does not cause glare beyond the site boundaries. It will rarely be used at night.
- The sign will be erected in February 2010, and will be smaller than the township maximum size of 4' by 6'.
- Dead and dying vegetation was removed. In spring 2010, it will be replaced with new vegetation appropriate to the site as well as new vegetation for screening.
- The driveways into and exiting the site occupy the same location as the former driveways. There is sufficient space on the site to accommodate drop-off and pick-up of students. When the school reaches its maximum enrollment, 310 additional trips will be generated daily, a 14.5% increase over 2006 Thomas Road traffic; and a 5.4% increase to projected Year 2030 Thomas Road traffic.

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The Code of Federal Regulations (36CFR part 18) established criteria that must be met in order to make a park building available for lease. Upon examination of the proposed lease with the MCHVF, the National Park Service determined that the terms of the lease met all the criteria:

- The lease will not result in degradation of the purposes and values of the park area.
- The lease will not deprive the park area of property necessary for appropriate park protection, interpretation, visitor enjoyment or administration of the park area.
- The proposed lease contains such terms and conditions as will assure the leased property will be used for activity and in a manner that are consistent with the purposes established by law for the park area in which the property is located.
- The lease is compatible with the programs of the NPS.
- The lease is for rent at least equal to the fair market value rent of the leased property.
- The proposed activities under the lease are not subject to authorization through a concession contract, commercial use authorization, or similar instrument.
- If the lease is to include historic property, the lease will adequately ensure the preservation of the historic property.